Brief History of Foot Tet Soo Khek Temple, Mount Palmer, and the Tanjong Malang Vicinity

The present site of Foot Tet Soo Khek Temple (also known as the Wang Hai Da Bo Gong Temple) on Palmer Road, sits at the foot of Mount Palmer where a military fortification from the colonial era was once sited. The temple is believed to be one of the earliest Chinese immigrant temples established in Singapore and is certainly the oldest Hakka institution on the island. Unverified anecdotal accounts claim the temple to pre-date the arrival of Raffles. The architectural style and construction techniques of the existing structure place the temple to some time in the mid 19th century. There are little if any architectural remains to suggest an earlier date. A commemorative plaque housed within the temple is the earliest artifact associated with the building, bearing an inscribed date of 1844. Separately, the earliest known map to indicate the existence of the temple is also from 1844, depicting it as a "Joss House" (Map 1).

19th century maps indicated that several village settlements are in the immediate vicinity of the temple. Tanjong Malang and Tanjong Pagar are the most prominent spits between Keppel Harbor and the main roadway off Singapore town. The channel into Keppel Harbor from the Tanjong Malang promontory has long been employed by local and Southeast Asian vessels prior to the arrive of the British, and it is possible that earlier coastal settlements are located on the former shoreline. The earliest village settlements reported during the colonial period is possibly Munshi Abdullah’s accounts of the construction of staked marine fishing traps (belat, jermal, or the more familiar kelong) at Tanjong Malang. Some time by 1825, villages and pagar stakes populated the coast from Tanjong Malang to Tanjong Pagar. The villages probably survived in one form or other into the late 1960s or even 1980s when the Ayer Rajah Expressway was constructed.

Mount Palmer is not only the home of the Foot Tet Soo Khek Temple but also various historical institutions ranging from Fort Palmer, Keramat Habib Nor and the Parsee Burial Grounds of the 19th century, to those of a more recent nature, the former Singapore Polytechnic (1954, today Bestway Building) and the Chinese YMCA (c.1956, today Palmer House). Mount Palmer standing at 100 feet was the largest in the Telok Ayer group of hillocks (Map 2). It was used for fill in the second reclamation of the Telok Ayer Basin (c.1904-15), and was completely leveled save for a small knoll that still remains to the northeast and the rear of the temple. This remnant of the hill was part of the Parsee Burial Ground and purportedly the earliest tombstone was recorded to

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3 On some maps, particularly those by J.T.Thomson, Tanjong Malang is known as Tanjong Batu.

4 “The Hikayat Abdullah”, translated by A.H.Hill, pp.160-161. Much thanks to Mok Ly Yng for alerting me to this reference. Munshi Abdullah states that kelongs were set up about a year after the establishment of the East India Company factory in Singapore, placing the date at 1820. However, Abdullah’s chronology may be at times faulty or of suspect. See Gibson Hill’s commentary in “The Date of Munshi Abdullah’s First Visit to Singapore”, Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society Vol.28 Part.1.

5 “Map of the Town and Harbour of Singapore” c.1825 in the collection of the British Library, United Kingdom.

6 Johannes Widodo presented an overview of the historical significance of the Tanjong Malang area in “Preserving the Memory of Place: Case for Support for Palmer Road Area Conservation in Singapore”, Journal of Asian Studies No.29 (2005).
be from 1828. The burial ground was exhumed some time in the 20th century prior to 1966.

A gun battery existed on the slopes of Mount Palmer from c.1859, guarding the eastern approaches to the New Harbour, and by 1870s the battery may have become derelict. A second lease of life came about for Fort Palmer in the late 1870s when defenses of Singapore were improved and a series of fortifications were constructed at Pasir Panjang, Blakang Mati, Pulau Brani, and Tanjong Katong. In 1888 a major war gaming exercise took place at the foot of Mount Palmer and the beaches of Telok Ayer and Tanjong Malang with the landing of some 500 troops along with field artillery pieces from HMS Firebrand. This is to the addition of some 200 soldiers role playing the defending army at Fort Palmer. Some time between 1905 and 1915, Fort Palmer was demolished along with the bulk of the hill, becoming filling for the second Telok Ayer reclamation project.

Keramat Habib Nor is believed to be established in 1866 with the passing of Habib Nor bin Mohammed al-Habshi and his burial on the southern most knoll at Tanjong Malang. Some maps depict this hill as Bukit Kramat (Map 2). However, an earlier map of 1861/2 depicts the existence of a mosque at its present locality but little else is known about it. Similarly, with the Parsee’s Lodge and Burial Ground, it is also not clear when they were established with the earliest known cartographic reference of the Parsee dating back to the 1844 J.T.Thomson map.

**Archaeological Research at Palmer Road Foot Tet Soo Khek Temple & Vicinity**

Archaeology is the study of the human past through material remains. Through the recovery of artifacts, ecofacts, features or architectural structures, the study of the site’s spatial usage in the past and also relations between socio-political-religious lifeways may be discerned. Archaeology involves controlled excavation and the systematic recovery of data from the ground, and does not only limit itself to the study of movable artifacts, information from the deposition of soil, sediments and stratigraphy can all provide clues for the archaeologist to interpret the past.

In July 2005, the archaeology team was approached by the members of the Committee for Historical and Cultural Studies of the Foot Tet Soo Khek Temple to explore the possibility of conducting archaeological investigations within the compound and immediate vicinity of the temple. The research objectives are as follows:

1) to explore for remains dating to and pre-dating the temple;

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8 Gibson Hill states in “Memoirs of the Raffles Museum No.3 December 1956” pp.248, that the original battery had been demolished and the land acquired by the Tanjong Pagar Dock Co. and on pp.183, Bogars writes that the land (comprising of the old battery) had been purchased by the company in 1878. For brief history of Fort Palmer, see Alan Harfield’s “British & Indian Armies in the East Indies 1685-1935”. The precise date of the earlier fortification is not known. Harfield and subsequent military historians placed it as 1859. However, a 1857 map by draughtsman Narayaman in the collection of the Singapore History Museum, shows the battery and Palmer Battery road. Further confusing the matter is a foot note by Bogars on pp.183 “Memoirs of Raffles Museum”, where he states a landlease dating to 1827 mentions Road to Battery, making it one of the earliest defensive positions in Singapore!
9 Archaeological excavations by the author from September 2004 – May 2005 uncovered much of the remains of Fort Tanjong Katong. The unpublished report of the project can be found at www.seaarchaeology.com.
11 “The Singapore Free Press 2nd August 1866”. Thanks to Ust Abu Zaki b Yusuf, Imam of the present Masjid Haji Muhammad Salie for providing a facsimile of the news clipping.
12 Jules Moniot 1861/2 Map showing town and environs of Singapore can be found in “Memoirs of the Raffles Museum No.3” pp. 142. He was Surveyor-General Straits Settlement from 1855-62.
2) to interpret the site usage and relationship(s) between the temple and other institutions in the Mount Palmer/Tanjong Malang area.

The project was undertaken in the following phases:

1) Preliminary Survey & Assessment
Preliminary site assessments conducted on 2nd July 2005 (Lim Chen Sian, Ng Ching Huei and Yeo Kang Shua), and 21st July 2005 (Lim Chen Sian, Yeo Kang Shua, Johannes Widodo) suggests that potential areas for investigations are primarily limited to grounds immediate to the northeast and south of the temple where suspected settlements associated with the temple are believed to be located. The terraces of the hillock and the open park land across the road south of the temple are also potential ground for archaeological reservoirs. The areas identified for excavation are:

- plot of land immediate northeast (adjacent and rear) of the temple measuring approximately 35m x 45m;
- plot of land/lawn south (front) of temple measuring approximately 15m x 10m;
- South Quay Open Space park land across the temple south of Palmer Road measuring approximately 120m x 50m,
- Knoll terraces, remnant of Mount Palmer.

2) Test Pit & Shovel Test Excavations
On site excavations were conducted from 10th January to 27th January 2006. A total of fifteen 2x2m test pits were randomly excavated, ten of which by mechanical backhoe (PAL 6-15). Excavation work are completed and all pits have since been backfilled. An additional seven 50x50cm shovel test pits were dug in the South Quay Open Space south of the temple (Map 3).

PAL 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 are excavated in northeast plot of land adjacent and rear of temple. PAL 3, 4, and 12 are sunk in the lawn in front of the temple, by the ritual offering burners. A single pit, PAL 13 is located to the south of the car park between the old and present Palmer Roads. PAL 14 and 15 are excavated on the plot of land believed to be the site of the Parsee Lodge (c.1828) and later Palmer Godowns (c.1920-70s). No excavation work was conducted on the terrace of Mount Palmer.

3) Post Excavation
Post excavation involves artifact processing, cataloging, analysis and archival research. At present processing, cataloging and preliminary analysis of the finds have been completed with detailed analysis still underway. Archival material from the National Archives of Singapore, Public Records Office Kew United Kingdom, National University of Singapore Libraries, and the Singapore History Museum were consulted.

Archaeological Findings
Excavations totaled 17 days where works were periodically interrupted by heavy cloudburst in the first week on site. Although detailed analysis of the artifacts is still in progress, it is possible to provide some general description and observations on the significance of the site.

The general stratigraphy of the site comprise of a thin layer of topsoil and sod approximately 10-15cm in depth, followed by a sandy clay layer where the cultural layer and artifacts are mainly located. PAL 2, 3, 4, and 5 not only yielded the largest quantity of artifacts, but architectural remains and archaeological features were also uncovered. Beneath the cultural layer, sterile packed clay is reached (from approximately 60cmbs) followed by the compact and powdery original clay of Mount Palmer (Illustration 3).

Shovel test pits conducted across the South Quay Open Space only served to confirm that the entire park land was built upon former foundations of the post war industrial and village
settlement. Brick and concrete obstructions varied between 30cmbs to 50cmbs (centimeters below surface). The presence of the concrete foundations hindered further explorations. The artifact yield consists primarily of post war building material and brick fragments. Several sub-surface auger cores were made; PAL-ST 5 to approximately 90cmbs where it became waterlogged and obstruction was met, and PAL-ST 6 to approximately 105cmbs revealing waterlogged red clay.

A total of 26,379grammes of artifacts were recovered from the test excavations predominantly from PAL 2, 4, and 5. The mechanically excavated test pits PAL 6, 7, 8, and 11 yielded nothing save for the original clay of Mount Palmer. It appears that these test areas were thoroughly cleared during the demolition of the industry and village settlement sometime in the 1970/80s.

A selection of the artifacts from the excavations as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artifact</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ceramics – Porcelain</td>
<td>521 pieces</td>
<td>9,303g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceramics – Stoneware</td>
<td>44 pieces</td>
<td>3,295g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass</td>
<td>110 pieces</td>
<td>6,192g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>15 pieces</td>
<td>2,410g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organic - Coral &amp; Shells</td>
<td>24 pieces</td>
<td>3,381g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic</td>
<td>41 pieces</td>
<td>614g</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ceramics

Ceramics as a term has a wide application and today applies to a range of items fired from clay. The ceramics recovered from the site are generally products of industrialization and mass production associated with an increasingly urbanized settlement. Porcelain electric insulators and wire spacers, as well as bathroom fixtures, glazed kitchen and floor tiles are found alongside crockery and porcelain serving wares from the United Kingdom and China. Most significant of the ceramics are large quantities of tea/coffee cups bearing the “N.A.A.F.I.” (Navy, Army, Air Force Institute) marks (see Second World War Midden below).

Chinese crockery are predominantly blue and white wares, mostly of the hand painted variety with ribbons or floral motives, as well as “miner” type bowls bearing the “double happiness” decoration. Two grey-white altar offering ritual wine cups were found immediately to the rear of the temple (PAL 9 and 10, Illustration 19).

European and European style serving wares include the “hotel” type plain cream or white with single colour band along the rim; printed floral; plants and fruits of the coffee shop or kopitiam varieties. Recovered are several pieces with the manufacturer’s mark, the yellow-cream “Sunshine Pattern” produced by J&G Meakin, United Kingdom (c.1940-63, Illustration 20); white “Gama…”(sherd broken off) type from Johnson & Bro , United Kingdom (c.1900-2004); and a yet to be identified piece marked “ACMA”. Besides the British ceramics, “Gaudy Dutch” style ceramics are also recovered.

Stoneware includes sherds of the utilitarian storage or flower pot variety, as well as 19th to early 20th century Bristol glazed beer, stout, ginger beer, soda water, or ink bottles. Several of these glazed bottles are found intact or relatively complete with slight breakages and wear. One of the brown salt glazed bottles has a manufacturer’s stamp “Lovatt and Lovatt, Notts, Langley Mill” from Nottinghamshire United Kingdom (c.1895, Illustration 26).

Glass

Glass shards from bottles and window planes are common finds for an urban archaeology site. Most of the glass recovered are from PAL 2 (see Second World War Midden below), and PAL 4 and 5 where architectural features are found. The window plane or flat glass shards are generally
machine manufactured and range from colourless to a light green or blue tinged. Some shards feature frosted texture or have decorative striations. The flat glass is of post war production.

Preliminary analysis of the bottle shards indicates that they are containers of minimally 1,000ml in volume. Some shards feature the manufacturer’s mark and embossed characters in English or Chinese scripts. Surprisingly no glass table wares (eg. drinking or serving glass) are found. A single intact late 19th century three-mold black glass (dark green) spirit bottle was found on top of Mount Palmer. Black glass spirit or liquor bottles are characteristically heavy and often its surface is visibly uneven due to it being either completely handmade and mouth blown, or only partially molded by some form of machinery.

Shards from another black glass bottle were also uncovered in PAL 3 along with the mid-late 19th century stoneware bottle. Complete soft drinks glass bottles dating to the 1970s and 80s are also found scattered along the terraces of Mount Palmer. Perhaps the most notable glass finds are from the Second World War midden, where chemist and other bottle shards are found in abundance (see Second War World Midden below).

Organics - Coral
By Jani Thuaibah Isa Tanzil

Organic material comprise of shells and corals. The corals are only found within the lawn south of the temple in PAL 4 and 12 (Illustration 30). These ecofacts are presently under analysis by the Marine Biology Laboratory, National University of Singapore.

The coral rubble pieces’ skeleton structures have been greatly eroded, hence identification is difficult, however the initial findings so far show that the corals belonging to the family Faviidae (with possibility of more than a few genus present), Mussiidae, Fungiidae, Poritidae (possibly from genus *Porites*) and Agaricidae (specifically genus *Pachyseris*). Without clear skeletal structures it is at present difficult to discern if there are also corals from the genus *Montipora* among the rubble pieces. All families/genus identified still exists on Singapore's coral reefs.

Most of the corals identifiable are those from massive coral growthform. Usually, these massive corals are quite difficult to remove from the reef, but are commonly found in the intertidal areas due to their resiliency to the harsh conditions in such zones. An intertidal zone is an area between the sub-tidal and supra-tidal zones, where it is covered during high tide, but exposed during low tide. The area receives strong sun exposure for twice a day (in Singapore there are diurnal tides, two high tides and two low tides in a day) and inundated by water (bringing in potential predators etc) twice in the same day. Also, this zone is prone to large waves during storms, wind (e.g. monsoon), and freshwater runoff (e.g. rain), adding additional stress factors.

In these areas, usually corals that are resilient to the conditions mentioned above are found. This includes corals of the massive growthform (especially if the site is exposed to big waves, strong winds, water currents etc). However, there are also a lot of small broken pieces of branching corals (that are not identifiable) and foliose corals (from genus *Pachyseris*) in the coral rubble recovered from the Palmer site. Interestingly, there is also the skeleton of the mushroom coral (Family Fungiidae, probably genus *Fungia*). This particular coral is actually free-living and the adults (which the samples seem to indicate) are not attached to any substrate, hence are very easily collected. Included in the coral rubble are also some shells, and among them is an oyster that usually embeds itself in massive corals.

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13 Jani is presently a Research Assistant at Marine Biology Laboratory, Department of Biological Sciences, National University of Singapore.
Parsee Burial Ground

In an urban context, archaeology is often not about spectacular discoveries but rather the recovery of the forgotten past and memories lost to rapid development and urbanization. The Parsee’s Burial Ground at Palmer Road is one such example, where the archaeologists re-uncovered what was thought to have been long forgotten. Midway up Mount Palmer, on the southern terrace, the remains of the Parsee’s mausoleums can still be found derelict and covered with undergrowth.

Albeit exhumed sometime in the 20th century, architectural remains of the tombs are littered along the terrace. Vestiges from a large four pillared arched mausoleum (approximately 6m x 3m), 19th century masonry and brickworks are apparent throughout the terrace (Illustrations 10-14). A tracing of Fort Palmer in 1874 (or 1894, writing illegible) clearly portrayed the Parsee’s mausoleums on the terrace (Map 5).

It is unclear when the burial ground was exhumed or if the Parsee’s Lodge (at the foot of the hill) survived the Second World War. A Japanese Map from 1920 indicated the lodge as part of the Palmer Godowns compound. 14 No excavation was carried out at the burial grounds on Mount Palmer, but random surface collection on the hill provided well preserved 19th century stoneware and glass bottles, as well as Chinese blue and white porcelain sherds. 15

Second World War Midden

PAL 2 located on the grounds of the present temple revealed considerable military related artifacts from the Second World War. The artifacts dating from 1942-45, are found in a midden (refuse dump), with the midden itself dating no later than 1950. The midden is sandwiched approximately 25-40cmbs between the topsoil and a layer of sandy clay, and the sterile compact powdery clay of Mount Palmer.

The midden by far yielded the most ceramic serving wares and glass bottle shards. The majority of the glass are plain body shards, and a selective measure was enforced to collect only those providing diagnostic or chronological interpretations (bases, shoulder, neck and mouth, embossing etc). A number of glass bottles bases exhibit embossing of maker’s marks and origin of manufacture, of which a percentage are from Canada or Talaha (South Africa). One of the South African shard is embossed with the date “1943”. The other maker’s marks include numerals and symmetrical shapes, and are more cryptic in nature which remains to be deciphered. The bottles are generally large capacity beverage bottles (minimally 1,000ml), although some may contain other non-consumable liquids (eg. paint thinner, Illustration 29).

Cobalt blue shards of hexagonal chemist bottles are also found in considerable numbers. At present the inverted double wolf’s hook marks at the bases have yet to be identified, but the chemist bottles are most likely to be of British origins (Illustration 28). Substantial numbers of ceramic serving wares making up 25% of the total porcelain finds from the excavation are recovered from the midden. At the base of these tea/coffee cups are printed “N.A.A.F.I. 1945 Wood’s England”. It is not clear if the imprint “1945” is a date signifying the year of manufacture or a commemoration. Singapore came under the British Military Administration following the Japanese surrender in August 1945, and the servicemen and women’s canteen and welfare organization, Navy, Army, Air Force Institute (N.A.A.F.I.) reopened its doors with the return of British and Commonwealth military personnel. N.A.A.F.I. not only operates the servicemen’s canteens and tuckshops, it also provides services like laundry, messing, and duty free shopping of hard to obtain imported merchandized from the soldier’s home country. Its first facility immediately after the war was at the Robinson & Co in Raffles Square (Illustration 27).

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15 Intact beverage bottles from the 1970s-80s are scattered throughout the hill, including the once popular soft drink favorites like Green Spot and Sinalco.
Other noteworthy finds are Japanese plastic malaria tablet tubes, presumably issued to the occupational force in Singapore. Some of which appears to still contain the anti-malaria pills (Illustrations 23-24). Several bakelite screw cap rifle oil containers for the British Lee Enfield rifles are also amongst the deposition (Illustration 25). Most interesting of the military related material are the packets of Japanese decontaminant paste, probably part of a soldier’s anti-biological/chemical kit. Instructions on the plastic container detailed the procedures to remove contaminant agents from skin and the preparation and application of the paste (Illustrations 21-22). 16

**Vernacular Architecture**

PAL 4 and 5 revealed interesting features of post war, possibly 1950/60s vernacular architecture. Eyewitness interviews 17 and examination of RAF aerial photos of the time period 18 indicate that the test excavation areas in question were of mixed usage with industrial concerns interspersed with a village/kampong settlement. The areas immediate and adjacent to the temple were occupied with innumerable corrugated iron structures (PAL 1, 2, 5, 6-11) that appears to be residential units. Facing the temple entrance and lined along the old Palmer Road were large industrial compounds (PAL 3, 4, and 12) of warehousing or manufacturing categories.

PAL 4 featured brickworks and concrete that appears to form a door post on red adobe flooring. The adobe flooring is constructed upon a layer of cement-sand screed, followed by coarse yellow sand, more adobe of crushed brick aggregates, coarse yellow sand, packed clay, yet another layer of coarse sand, and lastly bitumen sheets. A single course of supporting brickworks for piping are also associated with the feature. The bricks are those of post war variety (Illustrations 4-7).

PAL 5 revealed along the eastern profile, supporting brickworks for piping, the latter sandwiched between two set of walls with minimally five courses of bricks. The bricks are again of the post war variety with the *Bin Keow* brickworks of Jurong manufacturer’s mark in the frog (Illustrations 8-9).

PAL 15 was excavated on the former compound of the Palmer Godowns and suspected ground’s of the Parsee’s Lodge. This pit produced significant numbers of hand manufactured bricks from the 19th century as well as concrete.

**Other Features**

Excavations at PAL 3 had to cease because of modern EHT (extra high tension) cable works. The artifacts recovered from this pit consist of glass, ceramics, and bricks dating to the mid 19th century, they are however not in situ and were disturbed from the laying of the cable, therefore limited archaeological contextual data can be extracted from these finds. At PAL 13, asphalt from previous road alignments was found and further excavations abandoned.

**Significance of the Site & Conclusion**

The discovery of a midden from the Second World War, vernacular architecture from the post war period adds to the complex nature of which Foot Tet Soo Khek Temple co-existed with its neighbours. Little is known about the temple’s role during the Second World War, and the recovery of significant amounts of military related artifacts, both of the Allies (particularly British)

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16 Thanks to Dr. Morita Emi, Visiting Fellow Department of Japanese Studies, National University of Singapore for translating the text.

17 Random interviews with visitors/devotees to the temple as well as attendees of the Masjid Haji Muhammad Salleh.

18 F41, 81 RAF 26 July 1968; and F21, 81 RAF 4th July 1957 (Author’s Collection).
and Japanese armed forces, raises many questions on the relationships of the temple during the war and the immediate post war period.

From the contextual evidence retrieved, the midden was created either at the end of the war or the years following the close of the war, certainly no later than 1950. Why then was a large cache of Second World War material dumped into the site? All the items were containers or receptacles of some kind (beverage, liquor or chemical bottles, rifle oil containers, medicinal, and tea cups). How are these items used in relation to the temple and the Tanjong Malang vicinity at large? Does it suggests that within the temple’s present compound, a storage, or service (quartermaster) site related to the military existed, or perhaps it was merely a looter’s hoard?

The Second World War midden is an archaeologically important find for its narrow chronological range allows it to serve as a benchmark for the comparison of artifacts from other sites in Singapore. Archaeological research into this particular period of history is limited and it is rare to come across such finds in Singapore. What is known about the Second War World is usually told through the lens of historians from documents and eyewitness accounts as opposed to material culture from site specific excavations.

Historically, temples have been places of refuge and solace during periods of calamity and turmoil, often to be found in the forefront of rallying the community, organizing varied charitable and relief work. It may be worthwhile to examine past records of the temple’s involvement in such works and observe if any connections can be made about the relationship with British service organizations such as N.A.A.F.I. The cache of chemist bottle shards and Japanese medical artifacts (malaria pills and decontaminant agent) may also suggest apothecary or medical activities.

Albeit only preliminarily investigated, the remains of the Parsee Burial Grounds have the potential to be another archaeologically significant site. The Parsees are generally Zoroastrians who adhere to burial rites that centers around the exposure of the dead. Practices involve placing of the deceased on specially prepared high ground, towers, or hillocks to be exposed to birds of prey (particularly vultures) and the elements. Most historical accounts tell of part of Mount Palmer being acquired by the Parsees in around 1827/8, it is however, not known if such burial ritual was practiced in Singapore.

The archaeologist will be plagued by new questions with every new finding and the Palmer site is no different. What are the socio-political relations of the actors in the Tanjong Malang area? The Foot Tet Soo Khek Temple sits at the very edge of the Parsee’s Lodge and burial ground and shares the same road (branching off from Tanjong Pagar Road, and from 1880, Anson Road). Was there any interaction between these two communities and can material cultural remains provide these links? Were there any boundary markings or religious taboos that demarcated the disparate institutions?

The temple is located in the nexus of an intricately rich historic area. While there are significant milestones marking the events and evolution of the Tanjong Malang area from the earliest days of the colonial settlement, there are much we do not know of the institutions and actors themselves. Through archaeological remains, the material culture allows us to piece together a fraction of the past, providing insights to vernacular architecture and artifacts associated with the temple and the war, or simply re-uncovering a forgotten past like the abandoned Parsee Burial Grounds. The findings shed new light but indubitably raised more questions to the complex nature of how the temple interacts with the multifarious entities in the area, and paves the way for further archaeological research into the historically significant Tanjong Malang area.

The Foot Tet Soo Khek temple is the first private organization in Singapore to initiate and sponsor a project to investigate into the institution’s role and interactions between its multi-faceted neighbouring communities. The velocity of modern development in Singapore city has dramatically altered the socio-political and economic landscape of the isle. A relatively short
period of a decade or quarter century has removed much from the living memory, yet there are many when prompted who will still vividly recall the not so distant past and the final decades of colonial rule. Hopefully others in Singapore will emulate the Foot Tet Soo Khek Temple’s project to permit documentation through the material record of the rapid changes that had occurred on the isle, and the exploration of the evolution of a modern cosmopolitan city. It cannot be further emphasized that faced with the exuberant pace of development, the archaeological reservoir of colonial period Singapore diminishes with each passing day.

Acknowledgements

The archaeology team is most grateful to the Joint Trustees of the Foot Tet Soo Khek Temple; the Ying Ho Fui Kun Association and the Fong Yun Thai Association for the sponsorship and invitation to conduct archaeological research on the temple’s compound and the Tanjong Malang vicinity. Special thanks to Mr. Chen Po Seng (Ying Fo Fui Kun), Mr. Ng Ching Huei (Singapore History Museum), Dr. Johannes Widodo, Dr. Lai Chee Kien, and Mr. Yeo Kang Shua (Department of Architecture National University of Singapore) for initiating the project; Mr. Wan Meng Hao (Preservation of Monuments Board) for providing the permit to excavate; and to Mr. Lo Fa Hin and staff members of the temple for accommodating and assisting the team on site.

Archaeology Team Members

Lim Chen Sian – Project Archaeologist & Manager
Yeo Kang Shua – Field Crew
Omar Chen Liang Heng – Field Crew
Noel Hidalgo Tan – Field Crew
Wong Choon Wah – Field Crew
Lim Tse Tsiang – Field Crew
Octocon Yu Ming Hong – Field Crew
Foo Shu Tieng – Field Crew (part time)
Jun Guarin Cayron – Field Crew (part time)
Aaron Kao – Illustrator
Map 1. “Joss House” at the southern foot of Mount Palmer depicted in the “Plan of Singapore Town and Adjoining Districts from actual survey by John Turnbull Thomson, Government Surveyor, Singapore 3rd April 1844” (Author’s Collection)
Map 2. Mount Palmer and Telok Ayer group of hillocks prior to the Telok Ayer reclamation. Interestingly this map only depicts the gun battery at Mount Palmer. By this time, the temple, Parsee’s lodge and burial ground, keramat were already well established. “Map of Singapore Town shewing building allotments and registered numbers of crown leases. H.E. McCallum 1881”. (Author’s Collection)
Illustration 1. 360° Panoramic overview of site. To the left is the tiger shrine. PAL 1, 2 and 5 were excavated in empty plot. Keramat Habib Nor on small rise in center background. Plot of land in front of temple (PAL 3, 4 and 12) is visible behind barrier and blue van to the right.
Illustration 2. Ground breaking by temple officials. (Chua Ai Lin)

Illustration 3. General stratigraphy of site. Limited top soil, followed by sandy clay, packed and compacted powdery clay of Mount Palmer.

Illustration 4. PAL 4 with vernacular architectural remains, adobe flooring, from the post war period.
Illustration 5. PAL 4 detail of adobe flooring and stratigraphy.

Illustration 6. PAL 4 east wall profile showing adobe flooring. (Aaron Kao)

Illustration 7. PAL 4 north wall profile. (Aaron Kao)
Illustration 8. PAL 5 the supporting brick wall for piping can be see on the east wall.

Illustration 9. PAL 5 east wall profile. (Aaron Kao)
Map 4. 1957 RAF aerial photo of Tanjong Malang area. Superimposed is the approximate shoreline prior to reclamation. (Aerial photo Author’s Collection)
Map 5. Tracing of 1874 (or 1894 writing illegible) map of Fort Palmer. The Parsee Burial Ground is marked as "Tombs". (National Archives of Singapore)


Illustration 11. South terrace Mount Palmer.
Illustration 12. Masonary and brick remains of the Parsee Burial Ground on the south terrace, Mount Palmer.


Illustration 14. Demolished arched column of mausoleum.
Illustration 15. Typical working day at the site. Test pits completely flooded by the rain.

Illustration 16. Bailing of the test pits becomes a daily routine for the crew.

Illustration 17. A collection of 19th century hand manufactured, and 20th century bricks and tiles.


Illustration 21. WW2 Japanese decontaminant.

Illustration 22. Detail of decontaminant package.

Illustration 23. WW2 Japanese anti-malaria pill containers.
Illustration 24. Detail of plastic anti-malaria pill tube. The faint Japanese kanji for “Malaria” can be made out.

Illustration 25. Bakelite oil containers for the Lee Enfield rifle

Illustration 26. Stoneware bottle with the Lovatt & Lovatt mark. Such bottles are utilitarian in nature and contains a variety of liquids; beer, stout, ginger beer, soda water, mineral water, or ink.

Illustration 28. Cobalt blue chemist bottles.

Illustration 29. A variety of bottles with manufacturer’s marks.
Illustration 30. Organic finds include coral and shell. The corals recovered are native to Singapore waters.